



Elevated, Inaccessible, & Suspended Hides

Elevated and inaccessible hides in canine scent work are odor sources located above a dog's reach or inside containers (e.g., high cabinets, shelves, trees). These challenges test a dog's ability to locate odor without directly touching the source, requiring handlers to recognize subtle, often upward-focused alerts. They test a dog's ability to problem-solve and find the source of an odor they cannot physically touch.

Key Aspects of Elevated/Inaccessible Hides

- Hides that are unreachable, such as those placed on top of high furniture, behind grates, gates, or similar type barriers, or in elevated, contained spaces are considered inaccessible or elevated.
- Dogs may show frustration initially when beginning to train for these elements or, when trained, will indicate with non-typical responses (paws waving or digging at an area, staring upward at the source, bracketing a specific area of the search area).
- It is important that you as the handler can recognize when your dog is at the closest point to the source that they are able to achieve and to reward them, even if they cannot physically touch the hide.
- Introduce these slowly to build confidence. Start with slightly out-of-reach, then move to fully inaccessible to prevent frustration. If at any point your dog seems to be struggling go back to the last successful repetition/problem and let them have success.
- Keep in mind that high, windy, or complex environments (lots of layers in the search area) can disperse the odor plume, making it harder for the dog to pinpoint the exact location.
- Inaccessible hides can be frustrating for your dog if they are used to working in more open spaces. If that is the case, slowly make the environment smaller by adding items gradually over a period of time to help them start to problem solve corners, pooling, and aging scent.

Elevated Hides (High Hides)

Elevated hides are placed above the dog's head, requiring them to search in a vertical plane. Common locations for training include high shelves, inside cabinets, top of tall objects, on top of door jambs, or on walls.

- Scent plumes from high hides are typically larger because the odor is not obstructed, allowing it to travel further and more unpredictably. Depending on the air movement in the room it will start to drop and spread.
- Dogs may look up, stand on their hind legs, or pop-up (briefly lifting their front feet) to catch odor.
- It is critical to recognize when a dog's attention is upwards toward the source rather than just following a scent trail in a pooling area on the ground.

Inaccessible Hides

An inaccessible hide is any odor source a dog can detect but cannot reach or touch. These are categorized by the reason for their inaccessibility, and elevated and inaccessible can be the same in the right situation.

- Inaccessible due to Elevation: Hides placed too high for the dog to reach.
- Inaccessible due to Containment: Odor placed inside something, like a closed cabinet or a drawer, where the scent only escapes through small cracks or vents.
- Inaccessible due to Obstruction: Hides placed behind heavy furniture, inside a grate, behind gates, or deep within a cluttered area.

Training for Elevated and In accessible

- These types of hides are rarely found in Novice levels but become standard as teams move into Advanced, Excellent, and Elite levels in organizations like NACSW or the AKC.
- Plan your training exercises to build confidence in your dog. Introduce hides that are visible but blocked by something first (like a box in an open ex-pen) to build the dog's understanding without building frustration.

- For these hides, handlers must call "alert" when the dog is as close to the source as physically possible, even if they aren't touching it. Oftentimes with these elements the dog may not utilize the TFR as they problem solve the new presentation of odor.

When you set an Inaccessible hide, you have to ask yourself, "What will I take as an indication?" This is an easy question for accessible hides... inaccessible? Not so much. The answer to that question is related to the first question... indication within the parameters of being correct is your goal. Setting up inaccessible hides, be ready to watch all your dogs body language for changes that indicate they are closing in on the source.

The fact of the matter is that odor will respond to pushes and pulls from pressure changes (opening/closing doors), temperature differentials (AC/heat turning on or off), and other natural forces (sunshine, windows, pockets of shade/sun).

The higher the hide is placed, the wider you give your dog for marking a find. Also, the windier it is, the more time you will want to give your dog to work the problem!

Hides along walls require that the dog orient and look up and within a span of a certain space. If we were doing a suspended hide (hide suspended with nothing below it), odor would drop in a conical shape before being disturbed by air movement. If the hide was on a pole or a column, we'd take the pole because the pole provides a surface for the odor to move downwards and pool at the bottom.

Frustration destroys confidence.... meaning, the more you allow your dog to be frustrated, the more you are damaging his confidence. This is why early elevated/inaccessable hides should be easy and not done with a dog brand new to the sport.

Deep inaccessibles fall into this category as does anything the dog may not want to/ be able to because of the size of the dog or the dog feeling too much pressure (space might be too small/tight, the dog may feel uncomfortable climbing on surfaces, the dog is not ready to move up to this type of search).

It's very important that we decide what to take as a YES in order not to frustrate our dogs. Newer handlers are most likely to wait too long to call this type of inaccessible. Because the dogs have a hard time knowing when to alert, they may work the problem longer, bracket it, or disengage with the search. You end up having to call it on bracketing usually.

So what behaviors am I looking for?

Your dog is unique and has certain tells that give you information as the search progresses. Their body language should tell you when they are closing in, fringing, frustrated, or confident. A few behaviors you might see are

- Circling an area with exaggerated sniffing
- Jumping, pawing, frenzied indications (sit, down)
- Vocalizing
- Staring
- Bracketing an area (moving back and forth along an area, almost like a paranthesis or bracket)
 - the deeper the inaccessible, the wider the bracket

Safety

When setting up your hides make sure to scan the surrounding area for hazards. You don't want to place hides near anything sharp, electrical, or unstable (falling) hazards.

- Watch out for wires
- If you're searching around buildings watch out for rodent traps/poison
- Make sure that what you are placing a hide on is stable and won't fall on your dog
- Set hides so that your dog won't cause any damage to the location.
- Try not to place hides on anything scary! Of course this will vary from dog to dog, but some dogs find new, novel items a bit scary at first sight so make sure your dog will be comfortable with the items in the search area

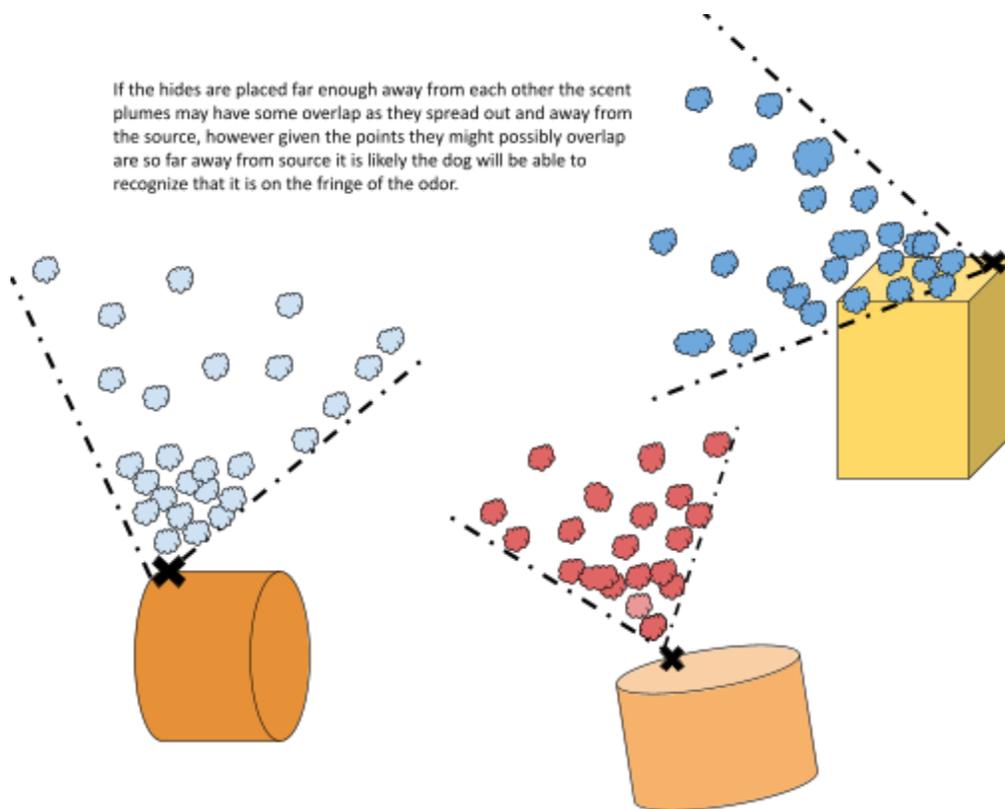
The stability of a hide refers to how long it gives information to the dog, or simply, how long the odor will be available to the dog. When we place hides we want to have clear sources of odor. That means that we want the dog alerting on the hide and

not on surrounding materials that may have absorbed odor. Items in your environment might absorb odor making it difficult for inexperienced dogs.

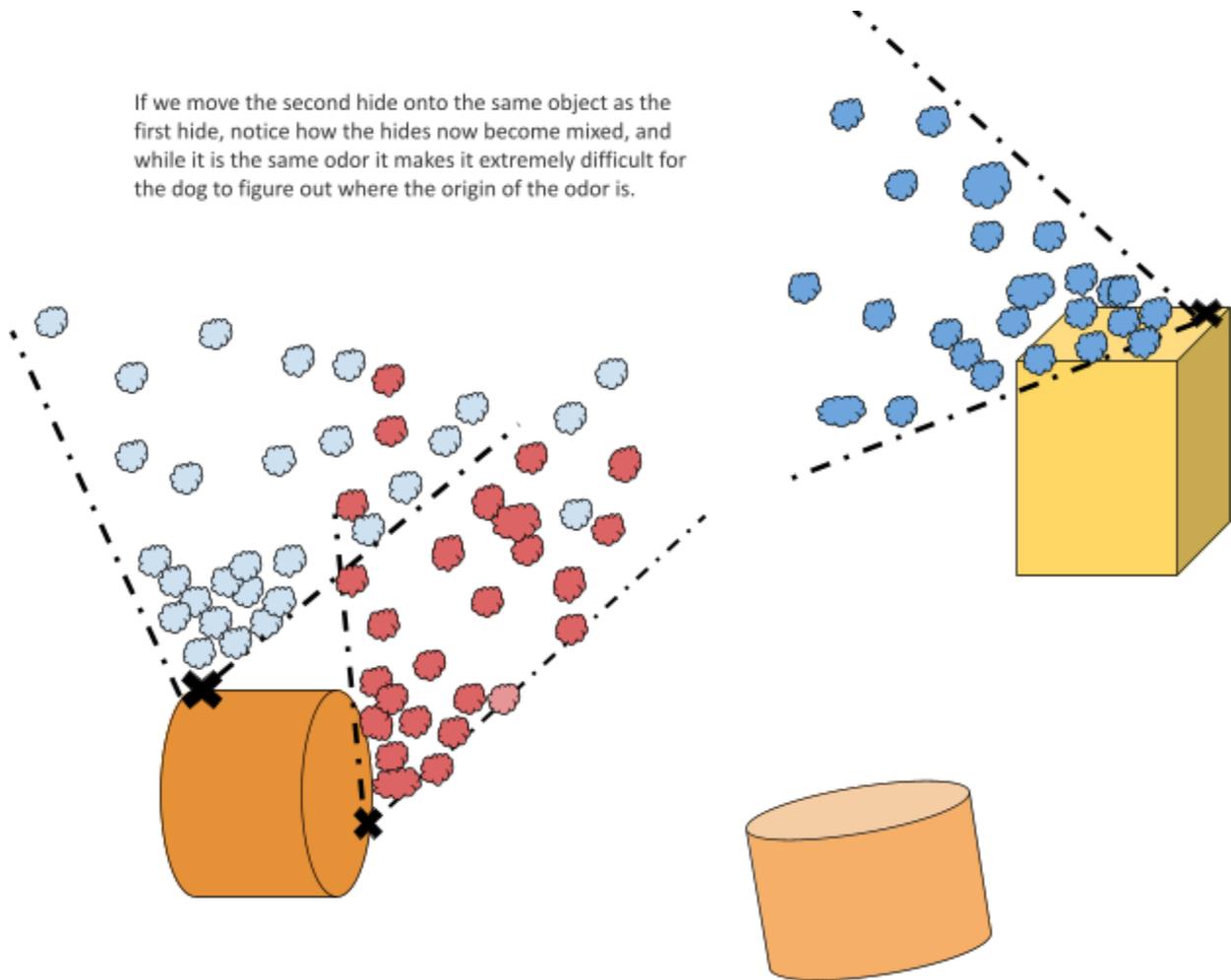
Certain materials absorb odor more readily than others and you should try to avoid placing hides in such a way that you are placing a hide directly on a porous surface. Materials that readily absorb odor include plastic, leather, fabric, cardboard, and styrofoam. Although other porous substances may also absorb odor, they will not absorb them to the degree that these materials will.

For instance, placing a hide on the handle of a plastic laundry basket will be fine in the short term. The longer that the hide ages, the more odor is absorbed into the plastic. Over time, it becomes difficult for the dog to discern between the hide and the hot plastic surrounding the hide. If you remove the hide, the plastic will still smell like target odor (what we know to be residual odor). The issue with porous substances is that the footprint of the hide grows in size over time. Where the footprint of the hide may initially start as the size of the hide, over time, the footprint increases in diameter and in essence becomes an area of constant odor. This will make it difficult for your dog and they will with accuracy which can ultimately over time affect the reliability of your dog's indications.

Placement of multiple hides should be done with some thought as to how the odor will plume and fill the space. If we place hides that have too much odor overlap, the dog is no longer wrong in the spaces where the hides overlap. This is referred to as converging. Here is a diagram of scent plumes. Take notice that the hides are on different objects and are placed at a distance sufficient to be distinguished from each other.



If we move the second hide onto the same object as the first hide, notice how the hides now become mixed, and while it is the same odor it makes it extremely difficult for the dog to figure out where the origin of the odor is.

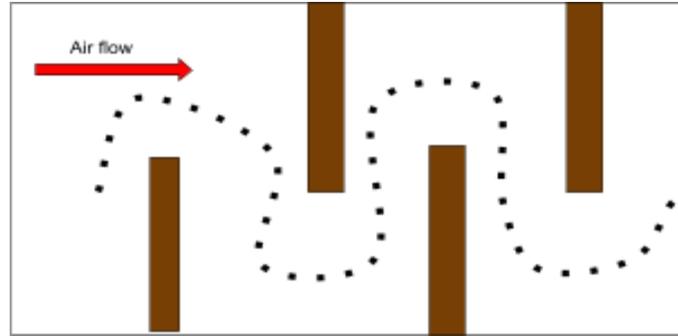


You may also have to deal with pooling, absorption of the odor, and channeling of odor (travels small grooves and cracks like an expressway). This sounds complicated and confusing for the dog. Why would we want to train for this? Because odor and air movement are fluid and variable. A scent picture in the early day with very little movement in the area looks way different than mid-day with rising sun/temperatures as well as scent dispersal from hot/cool air movement as well as disturbed areas from human/dog movement. Your dog needs to be able to recognize and categorize the different levels (concentrations) of odor, the age of the hide, and sort out overlapping plumes. The only way to achieve this is practice and repetition.

We achieve this behavior in the dog by teaching them to detail. In order to teach the dog to work all the way to the source the dog needs to learn to focus closely and really pinpoint the hide. This is called detailing.

Detailing represents odor obedience and persistence... because a dog has to work to get to source. The more we can encourage our dogs to learn to use detailing, the more confidence they will have for commitment to source. Some dogs seem to do this naturally and some need to learn the skill.

We can teach our dogs detailing by working cluttered areas, or rough or baffled surfaces. But what is baffling? Baffles, by definition, are placed in an area to lessen the movement or availability of something (water, sound, light) but still allows some of the item to pass through.



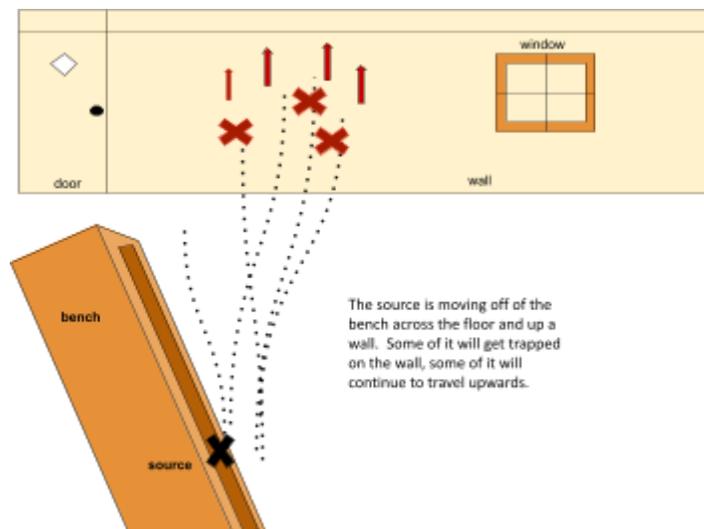
Baffles will slow down and dampen flow. And if there are pockets, turns, and corners you may find some odor collected there, but as the air moves through an area the dog should learn to follow the strongest concentration of odor, which will be the path of air flow.

Whether searching a baffled surface, rough surface or cluttered area, a dog must problem solve the level of available odor to find the source. Pooling odor is a difficult skill to learn. The dog must find, categorize, and decide what part of the scent plume they are in to work toward the source.

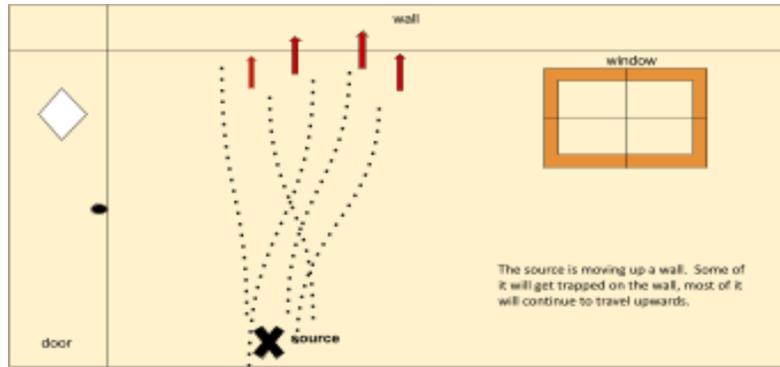
Pooling occurs typically in areas of humidity, corners, against objects, or it can occur in a confined space like a channel/grove, or space between objects. These confined spaces are quite common. Pooling usually occurs in areas that are slightly cooler than the ambient temperature.

Trapping odor is what happens when odor collects and is trapped due to the configuration of the area. We see this a lot in cluttered search areas. You can train with a trapping odor exercise fairly easily. Place an open odor jar in an area that will trap odor (such as under a table, chair, bench) and place a hide nearby of the same type of odor. Remove the odor jar and bring your dog in to work the area. They will likely investigate thoroughly, try to get close to the source, and you may see behaviors like circling, pawing, vocalizing, and bracketing.

But what if there is nothing in the way, no baffles or clutter or items to catch and pool the odor? If the area is more open and there is more of an air current moving through the search area you might expect the source to move like this. This is blowing odor.



When odor is not interrupted by anything and is allowed to drift directly upwards it is known as lofting odor. Lofting odor refers to a scent behavior that typically occurs after sunset when the ground cools faster than the air, causing scent particles to rise or loft rather away from the surface. This often creates tricky puzzles for dogs as the odor lifts away from the source.



Remember air flow moves towards heat sources, hot air is rising and cool air sinks. You want to look for large windows and determine if the windows will pull the air in one direction or if you have windows along multiple walls.

Suspended Hides & Their Nuances

Suspended hides in canine scentwork are elevated hanging targets (up to 5 feet or higher) that challenge dogs to follow scent plumes upward, enhancing 3D scenting skills and inaccessibility training. They force dogs to pinpoint odor sources above ground level—often using magnets or clips to hold scent vessels on lines, chairs, or branches—building focus and improving patience when the source cannot be directly reached.

Key Aspects of Suspended Hides

These hides advance a dog's skills by training them to work in 3D spaces, follow scent cones higher, and handle varied airflows. Dogs must learn to follow odor plumes that move upward or "pool" at different heights based on airflow, rather than just searching ground-level surfaces. Since the dog often cannot make direct physical contact with the source, these hides build focus and frustration tolerance.

- Hides can be hung from clotheslines, branches, or ceilings. Common tools include magnetic containers (bullet containers), binder clips, and small vessels.
- Start with low, reachable hides to build confidence before increasing height.
- Handlers should encourage dogs to alert without needing to touch the hide, bringing rewards directly down from the source to build motivation.
- Suspended hides, and hides placed higher than the dog can reach, help dogs (especially smaller breeds) gain confidence in alerting to odor sources at height.

- **Hanging Cup Drill:** Suspend multiple identical cups (Solo cups work well for this) from a string, with only one containing the odor vessel. Initially just start with one hot cup and then add a few more at a time.
- **Adjustable Heights:** Start with a hide just slightly higher than your dog's nose then move it higher as the dog learns that source can be overhead.

